

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 (ISO) W
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O P 191313Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5299

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL ASMARA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4609

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, ET

SUBJ: CISCO II; KAGNEW FOUR

REF: STATE 272520

1. SUMMARY: ABU SAADAH TOLD EMBOFF NOV 18 THAT HE
WOULD BE WILLING PERSONALLY TO DELIVER LETTERS TO
CISCO II AND ALSO TO NAVCOM II AND BRING BACK MESSAGES
FROM CAPTIVES. HE ALSO OFFERED TO BRING US LIST OF
ERITREAN DEMANDS. ANOTHER MEETING HAS BEEN TENTATIVELY
SET FOR NOV 21 TO GIVE ABU SAADAH THE MESSAGES TO
CISCO II. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF (HOOPER) MET WITH ABU SAADAH EVENING NOV 18 TO
ASK WHETHER HE WOULD BE WILLING TO TRY TO TRANSMIT
FAMILIES' LETTERS TO CISCO II CAPTIVES HARREL AND
CAMPBELL. WITHOUT MUCH HESITATION ABU SAADAH NOT
ONLY AGREED TO PASS LETTERS TO PLF, WHICH HOLDING
CISCO II, BUT OFFERED TO UNDERTAKE VISIT TO ERITREA
HIMSELF AND DELIVER LETTERS PERSONALLY TO CAPTIVES.
HE THEN ASKED IF WE HAD ANY LETTERS FOR OTHER TWO
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CAPTIVES AND OFFERED TO TRY AND LOCATE THEM AS WELL

TO DELIVER MESSAGES. NOT ONLY WOULD HE DELIVER MESSAGES BUT HE SAID THAT HE WOULD RETURN WITH LETTERS FROM ALL FOUR CAPTIVES TO THEIR FAMILIES.

3. ABU SAADAH THEN RAISED WITH EMBOFF ISSUE OF USG WILLINGNESS TO MEET ERITREAN "DEMANDS" FOR RELEASE OF PRISONERS, AND SUGGESTED THAT HE BE PROVIDED WITH LIST OF USG "PROPOSALS" TO ERITREANS WHICH HE WOULD DELIVER TO THEM WITHIN ERITREA. HE STATED THAT ERITREAN REPS OUTSIDE ERITREA WERE RELATIVELY POWERLESS AND OFTEN IGNORANT OF SITUATION THERE. SUCH WAS CASE REGARDING KAGNEW FOUR, HE NOTED, AND THEREFORE HE PREFERRED TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH "REAL" LEADERS IN ERITREA WITH WHOM HE HAD CLOSE RELATIONSHIP AS RESULT OF HIS SIX TRIPS TO ERITREA SINCE 1969. HE SAID HE COULD BRING BACK LIST OF ERITREAN DEMANDS IF WE WISHED. EMBOFF TOLD HIM THAT HE NOT IN POSITION TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE USG PROPOSALS BUT ONE THING WAS CERTAIN THAT USG WOULD NOT PAY MONEY FOR RELEASE OF CAPTIVES.

4. ABU SAADAH DESCRIBED ERITREAN MOVEMENT AS DIVIDED BETWEEN TWO GROUPS, POPULAR LIBERATION FORCES (PLF) OF OSMAN SABBE WITH OFFICES IN BEIRUT AND REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (RC) OF AHMAD NASSIR HEADQUARTERED IN DAMASCUS. TWO GROUPS ATTEMPTED TO COORDINATE THEIR ACTIVITIES THROUGH ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT (ELF). HE SAID THAT PLF HELD HARRELL AND CAMPBELL AND RC HELD OTHER TWO (STRICKLAND AND BOWIDOWICZ).

5. IMPRESSIONS OF ABU SAADAH: AHMAD ABU SAADAH IS APPROXIMATELY THIRTY YEARS OF AGE, WAS BORN IN DAMASCUS AND HOLDS SYRIAN NATIONALITY. HE SPEAKS ARABIC AND FAIR ENGLISH. HE SPOKE IN LOW-KEY MANNER AND SHOWED SOME CONTINUING INTEREST IN THE CONDITION OF HARRELL AND CAMPBELL, BUT PROFESSED TO HAVE HEARD NOTHING MORE ABOUT THEIR STATUS SINCE HIS RETURN FROM ERITREA. HE ASKED NUMBER OF QUESTIONS TO ELICIT EXTENT OF EMBOFF'S KNOWLEDGE

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OF ERITREAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT, AND FROM HIS ATTEMPTS TO DESCRIBE RELATIVE POWER OF ERITREAN LEADERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE ERITREA IT IS CLEAR THAT HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF SOMETHING OF AN EXPERT ON SUBJECT. MEETING TOOK PLACE IN WELL-KNOWN LOCAL RESTAURANT WHERE ABU SAADAH SHOWED NO SIGNS OF BEING ILL-AT-EASE WITH OBVIOUS WESTERNER WHO IDENTIFIED HIMSELF IMMEDIATELY AS EMBASSY OFFICER. HE MADE NO

ATTEMPT TO CONVINCE EMBOFF OF JUSTICE OF ERITREAN CAUSE, AND DID NOT ONCE MENTION U.S. SUPPORT FOR EPMG. ABU SAADAH DID NOT REQUEST ANY FEE OR FUNDING AT THIS MEETING BUT FROM HIS DEPORTMENT AND STATEMENTS, SUCH AS HIS WILLINGNESS TO UNDERTAKE JOURNEY "IF YOU WANT ME TO DO IT," REQUEST FOR PAYMENT COULD WELL BE FORTHCOMING. SINCE HE HAS ALREADY SOLD TAPES OF HIS INTERVIEWS, IT MAY ALSO BE DIFFICULT TO KEEP ANYTHING PASSED TO OR THROUGH HIM OUT OF PUBLIC DOMAIN.

6. EMBOFF HAS TENTATIVE APPOINTMENT TO MEET WITH ABU SAADAH MORNING NOV 21 TO DELIVER TEXTS OF MESSAGES TO CISCO II. WOULD APPRECIATE GUIDANCE ON OTHER POINTS MENTIONED BY ABU SAADAH.
PELLETREAU

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